DOI 10.1515/olzg-2015-0177

Rahman, Tariq: *From Hindi to Urdu*. A Social and Political History. Karachi: Oxford University Press 2011. 350 S. 8°. Hartbd. Pak-Rs 1095,00. ISBN 978-0-19-906313-0.

When I first saw the title of the book under review, I thought: "This is the book I always wanted to write", and for a short while felt a little twinge of jealousy. But then immediately this reflection came to my mind: could there be a person more suitable to write such a book than Professor Tariq Rahman, the renowned linguist who for more than three decades has engaged most of his academic efforts in research on sociolinguistic history and the relationships between language and politics among the Pakistani and North Indian Muslims; who has authored several books and dozens of articles devoted to these subjects; and who – without much exaggeration – might be called the founder of contemporary Pakistani sociolinguistics? So, rid of the last traces of envy, I started reading *From Hindi to Urdu* with impatient curiosity and – as might be expected – was not disappointed.

The book, which according to the author's own admission cost him five years of painstaking scrutiny, was simultaneously published in both Pakistan (OUP Karachi) and India (Orient BlackSwan). This may be perceived as a meaningful or even metaphorical occurrence, especially with regard to its contents, as well as to the starting point on which Tariq Rahman builds up his considerations. Already in the introduction we are reminded of the shared linguistic tradition, common for what was later – mainly on the basis of political decisions and actions – artificially set apart and labelled as two different languages. However, according to the author one should not forget that for centuries "the name of the language we now call Urdu was mostly Hindi", even though "then it was not *this* language" (p. 1). On the basis of this assumption Tariq Rahman defines so-called high-flown (Sanskritised) Hindi and so-called high-flown (Persianised and Arabicised) Urdu as two extremes, positioned at two distant ends of the linguistic continuum, still covering vast areas of northern South Asia. This continuum, which he calls Hindustani, constantly "veers towards one end or the other, according to the speaker, the occasion and the environment" (p. 99), but this is the medium through which vast masses in Pakistan can enjoy Bollywood movies and Indian fans can watch Pakistani TV dramas on Indian TV.

Rahman clearly highlights that his intention was not to write a history of Urdu literature, but to elaborate on the

Bespr. von **Agnieszka Kuczkiewicz-Fraś**, Krakau,
E-Mail: atka.kuczkiewicz@yahoo.co.uk

social and political history of the language by focussing on the use of Urdu in different social domains, such as governance, judiciary, education, media and entertainment (p. 6). In successive chapters he step by step reveals and examines various levels on which this language, which we now call Urdu, was used for nearly seven hundred years. At the same time he elucidates how the process through which the politicised modern Hindu and Muslim identities were created was in the course of time reflected in language, and also how language was intentionally used as a tool of crucial importance in this process initiated in the second half of the nineteenth century.

In the extensive introductory part of his book, which consists – apart from the "Introduction" itself – of the three following chapters ("Names", "Age", "Origin and Historiography"), Rahman tries to answer such key questions as when and where Urdu was born, what language(s) it descended from and under what names it was known earlier.[1] Quoting vastly from primary sources (e. g. the writings of Amīr Ḫusrau, Abū 'l-Faẓl or Bābar) as well as previous scholarly studies (such as those by George A. Grierson, Amrit Rai, Christopher R. King or Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, to name only a few), and using linguistic data wherever possible, he opposes the commonly repeated theory that Urdu was created in military camps in order to facilitate interactions between the natives (Hindus) and the newcomers (Muslims). In Tariq Rahman's opinion, such a fallacious assumption, namely associating the birth of Urdu with Muslim (or Mughal) armies, was formed to prove the 'pure' Muslim character of the language and to support the process of its Islamisation. He is highly critical towards opinions generally presented by the Urdu historiographers, like Ǧamīl Ǧālibī or Ḥāfiẓ Maḥmūd Šīrānī, who tried to convince the readers about the distinctive Muslim character of Urdu, which is supposed to manifest itself in presenting the emotions and ideas of Muslims and the prevailing use of Perso-Arabic diction. As a result of this attitude Hindu writers were usually excluded from histories of Urdu literature, including the paradigmatic textbooks used in colleges, and the perception of successive generations of readers has been formed in accordance with this ideologically constructed historiography.

The Islamisation of Urdu, concurrent with the standardisation of the language, which took place in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has been thoroughly analysed in the fifth chapter. Rahman describes the essential influence of Urdu poets who in this period established the standards for the medium of their literary production, playing in this way the essential role of linguistic reformers. He also underlines that only since this epoch has Urdu begun to be considered as a superior class indicator, seeing as it was used mainly by common people in the preceding centuries (while the language of the elites of those days was Persian). As a result of these processes, Urdu, in the course of the nineteenth century, was getting more and more closely associated with Islam, to become finally, at the turn of the century, a symbol of Muslim identity strongly propagated by the Pakistan Movement, and perceived as an "Islamic language" of South Asia. Rahman discusses this Islamic aspect of Urdu in the following, sixth, chapter, using a prism of Urdu religious writings produced by all main schools of Islamic thought present in South Asia.

According to the author, these politically and somewhat artificially created bonds of the Urdu language with Islam, promulgated by the reformers of colonial times and remaining in line with the puritanical attitude of the Victorian era, successfully stifled its natural, sustained associations with love and eroticism sanctioned by literary practice. In the seventh chapter, titled "Urdu as the Language of Love", Tariq Rahman describes this amorous tradition of Urdu as well as the reasons for which it has been discontinued in post-Partition Pakistan and India. His conclusion is rather unequivocal: Urdu, having become a politicised symbol of Pakistani nationalism and Indian Muslim identity, is no longer used for expressing love and longing, and even nostalgic throwbacks to the Mughal or Nawabi past cannot revive this waning aspect of the language.

The eighth chapter of *From Hindi to Urdu* is devoted to the question of the mutual relations between the British and Hindustani in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The significant role played by the British in shaping the linguistic situation of the subcontinent has been investigated earlier by different authors. The British rulers of colonial India were the first to use a local vernacular (Hindustani) "as a tool of imperialism" (cf. p. 201) in various domains of power. They were also responsible for creating and later reinforcing rivalry between Hindi and Urdu as the markers of antagonistic Hindu and Muslim identities. The British wrote grammar books and dialogue books and produced all kinds of instructional materials to learn the language as well as spread it all over India. All these are known facts. But Tariq Rahman depicts a less documented process, namely, how Hindustani was taught and learnt by the British in India during colonial times. He also addresses such issues as the attitude of the rulers towards "the language of the colonized" (p. 202),

1 The names he enumerates and unravels are (here Anglicised): Hindi / Hindvi / Hindui, Dehlavi, Gujri / Gojri / Gujarati, Dakhni, Indostan / Moors, Rekhta and Hindustani, the latter examined by the author in great detail.

the phenomenon of code-switching or attempts to write Hindustani in Roman characters.

In his book Tariq Rahman challenges widespread opinions more than once, undermining them by arguments and evidence gathered during his meticulous research. But he also sails into uncharted waters, dealing with unknown (or lesser-known) areas of the subject he has in focus. One such unexplored area is Urdu in India's Princely States and the process of "Urduization" (pp. 228 ff.) in those among them in which Persian was partly or totally replaced by Urdu as a result of deliberate political decisions (chapter nine of the book). Of special interest for the author are the two most powerful principalities, Hyderabad and Kashmir, but he also sketches the situation of Urdu in smaller 'Muslim' states like Rampur or Bhawalpur.

The following five chapters (ten to fourteen) comprise a number of insightful analyses showing how the Urdu language has been used in different public domains, from employment in the lower levels of judiciary and administration, through education and print, up to the sphere of media and entertainment, i. e. radio, film and television. Rahman also ponders over what the political implications of such an adoption of the language are. Some previously unexplored problems are discussed in this part of the book, like for instance that of choosing the language in which programs were broadcast by All India Radio in the early days of this institution. The diverse sources of information used by Tariq Rahman during his research, comprising *inter alia* face-to-face interviews or popular websites, allow the author to shed new light on the subject and expand upon topics already studied by other scholars or by himself.

The book has been properly glossed and indexed. It also reads very well since the main text is interrupted by footnotes or references only occasionally. The huge, comprehensive bibliography (pp. 405–445) has been divided into five sections, containing successively: i) reports and official documents; ii) manuscripts and letters; iii) books and articles in Oriental languages (for the most part in Urdu, but also over a dozen in Persian and a few in Hindi and Pashto); iv) books and articles in Western languages; v) interviews, websites etc. There are very few minor typos traceable; otherwise, the book has been edited and published almost flawlessly.

What might be considered a drawback is the method of notation of words and phrases originally written in non-Roman (usually modified Perso-Arabic) script. Tariq Rahman opted for a simplified transliteration, which here and there is even mixed with common English transcription. This leads to some inconsistencies, for instance the erratic way of representing the semi-vowel *wāw*, which sometimes is represented by *v* (as in *maulvī*), sometimes by *w* (as in *niswā*; both examples are taken from p. 402, but there are others in the book).[2] More confusingly, such a system of Romanisation does not allow the original spelling of the quoted expressions to be identified accurately. However, the knowledge of their exact form may be a key to success or failure when trying to correctly understand the text under scrutiny – especially in the case of a language such as Urdu, where variations in spelling are common in writings of all periods and a reader often deals with different lections of the same text. Unfortunately, inaccurate Romanisation is a common error in works which are not purely linguistic, even though they touch upon some linguistic matters – and Tariq Rahman's book is not free of this fault either.

But putting aside deliberations concerning the necessity of more or less exact transliteration, one must admit that Tariq Rahman's *From Hindi to Urdu* is an important and highly informative book not only for scholars of Urdu or for those who study the linguistic situation in South Asia, but also for those who are interested in connections and mutual influences between language, society and politics in general. His comprehensive, carefully documented and detailed study has every chance to gain the status of a classic, a mandatory volume in every decent book collection devoted to the sociolinguistics of South Asia.

2 Though transliteration systems do differentiate between Arabic, Persian and Urdu, in the examples adduced no such differentiation on language lines is implied.